



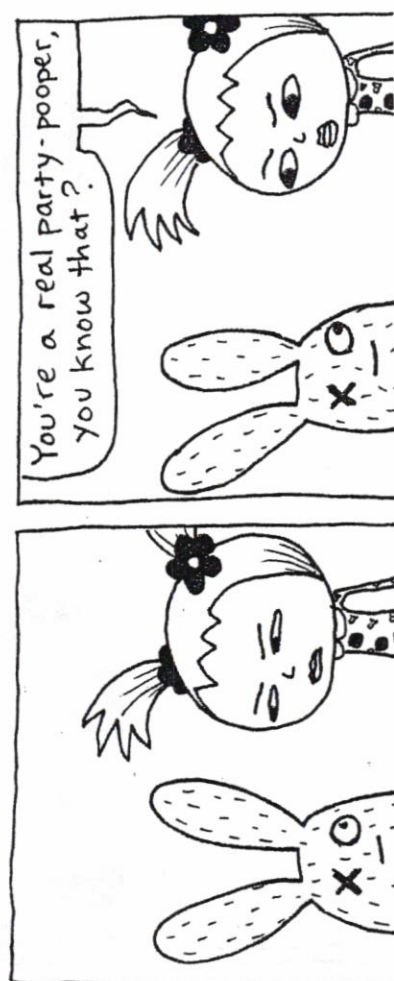
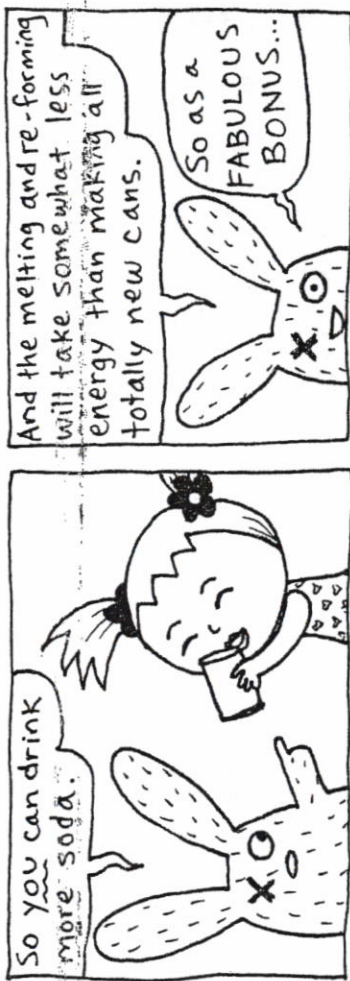
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ON PACIFISM
writings by derrick jenson

These writings and comics come from two excellent books, Endgame, by Derrick Jensen, and As the World Burns, also written by Jensen and illustrated by Stephanie McMillan. They are printed with the goal of furthering discussions about when violence is and is not a reasonable response to the destruction of the natural world.





PACIFISM, PART I

The people in power will not disappear voluntarily; giving flowers to the cops just isn't going to work. This thinking is fostered by the establishment; they like nothing better than love and nonviolence. The only way I like to see cops given flowers is in a flower pot from a high window.

William S. Burroughs¹⁹⁵

MANY HUNDREDS OF PAGES AGO, AND NOW FOR ME MANY YEARS AGO, I wrote that this book was originally going to be an exploration of when counterviolence is an appropriate response to the violence of the system. In fact what has become this book was supposed to be nothing more than a pamphlet in which I took the main arguments normally presented by pacifists and examined them to see if they make any sense. Here now is that pamphlet.

Here are some standard lines thrown out by pacifists: I'm sure you, too, have heard them enough that if we had a bouncing red ball we could all sing along. Love leads to pacifism, and any use of violence implies a failure to love. You can't use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. It's far easier to make war than to make peace. We must visualize world peace. To even talk about winning and losing (much less to talk about violence, much, much less to actually do it) perpetuates the destructive dominator mindset that is killing the planet. If we just visualize peace hard enough, we may find it, because, as Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller tells us, "Peace is rarely denied to the peaceful." Ends never justify means, which leads to Erasmus saying, and pacifists quoting, "The most disadvantageous peace is better than the most just war." Gandhi gives us some absolutism, as well as absolution for our inability to stop oppressors, when he says, "Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love." Gandhi again, with more magical thinking, "When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but in the end, they always fall—Think of it, ALWAYS."⁹⁶ Violence only begets violence. Gandhi again, "We must be the change we wish to see." If you use violence against exploiters, you become like they are. Related to that is the notion that violence destroys your soul. If violence is used, the mass media will distort our message. Every act of violence sets back the movement ten years. If we commit an act of violence, the state will come down hard on us. Because the state has more capacity to inflict violence than we do, we can never win using that tactic, and so must never use it. And finally, violence never accomplishes anything.

Let's take these one by one. Love leads to pacifism, and any use of violence implies a failure to love. If we love we cannot ever consider violence, even to

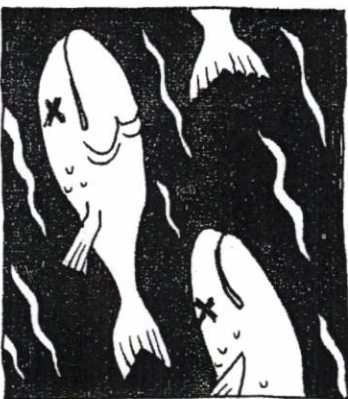
Did you know that if you recycle a single aluminum can, you can save enough energy to power a television set for three hours?



Oh my GOD! That is SO HELPFUL!!



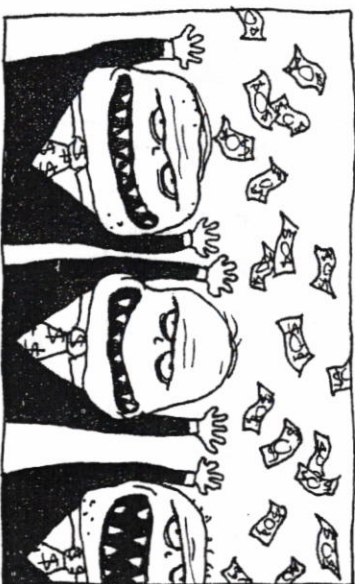
You mean big industries can make lots of money by building dams for aluminum smelting, choking the life out of rivers and killing the fish, plus tearing up great swaths of Africa for mining bauxite?



Wow!

Big money for builders, miners and manufacturers!

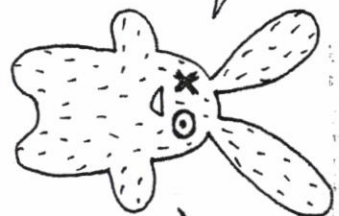
Fabulous!



Then countless people can acquire Alzheimer's Disease from ingesting the toxic metal!



Drinking the soda from the cans will help millions enjoy diabetes, obesity and malnutrition!



those who joined the empire's armed services just so they could go to college? You—Leia, Han, Luke, and Chewbacca—are heartless and cruel."

In the exciting final scene of the environmentalist version, a scuffle breaks out between Leia, Luke, Han, and Chewbacca on one side, and the pacifists on the other. At last the pacifists chase those four from the room and from the film. They're never seen again, which isn't really important since in this version they're minor characters anyway. The Death Star looms closer and closer. Audience members chew their fingernails as they wait to see whether the letters and petitions and lawsuits will work their magic. Viewers see lasers inside the Death Star warning up to destroy the planet. The lasers glow a hellish red. The era switches to cover the endangered planet. Suddenly a cheer will rise up from the audience as they see a small bright speck emerge from the planet's surface and speed into space. "Yes!" they will roar, as they learn that all of the intrepid environmentalist protesters were able to get off the planet moments before it got blown up!

Coda: The final shot of the movie, revealing what a complete triumph this was for the rebels, will be a still showing an article on the lower-left of page forty-three of the *New Empire Times* devoting a full three sentences to the destruction of the planet. Yes! The protesters got some press!⁴⁷³



During the Q & A of a talk I gave last week, someone asked, "How many environmentalists does it take to change a lightbulb?"

"I'll bite," I said, "How many?"

"None," he replied. "They just sit in the dark and whine about fossil fuel emissions."

I didn't get it. Evidently, neither did anyone else in the audience. Nobody laughed. I, as well as the rest of the audience, ended up more or less scratching our heads.

Later that night, an answer came to me: Ten. One to write the lightbulb a letter requesting that it change. Four to circulate online petitions. One to file a lawsuit demanding it change. One to send the lightbulb lovingkindness™, knowing that this is the only way real change occurs. One to accept the lightbulb precisely the way it is, clear in the knowledge that to not accept another is to do great harm to oneself. One to write a book about how and why the lightbulb needs to change. And finally, one to smash the fucking lightbulb, because we all know it's never going to change.

protect those we love. Well, we dealt with this several hundred pages ago, and I'm not sure mother grizzly bears would agree that love implies pacifism, nor mother moose, nor many other mothers I've known.

You can't use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house. I can't tell you how many people have said this to me. I can, however, tell you with reasonable certainty that none of these people have ever read the essay from which the line comes: "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House," by Audre Lorde (certainly no pacifist herself). The essay has nothing to do with pacifism, but with the exclusion of marginalized voices from discourse ostensibly having to do with social change. If any of these pacifists had read her essay, they would undoubtedly have been horrified, because she is, reasonably enough, suggesting a multivariied approach to the multivariied problems we face. She says, "As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist."¹⁹⁷ We can say the same for unarmed versus armed resistance, that activists have been taught to view our differences as causes for separation and suspicion, rather than as forces for change. That's a fatal error. She continues, "[Survival] is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."¹⁹⁸

It has always seemed clear to me that violent and nonviolent approaches to social change are complementary. No one I know who advocates the possibility of armed resistance to the dominant culture's degradation and exploitation rejects nonviolent resistance. Many of us routinely participate in nonviolent resistance and support those for whom this is their only mode of opposition. Just last night I and two other non-pacifists wasted two hours sitting at a county fair table for a local environmental organization and watching the—how do I say this politely?—supersized passersby wearing too-small Bush/Cheney 2004 T-shirts and carrying chocolate-covered bananas. We received many scowls. We did this nonviolent work, although we accomplished precisely nothing. But many dogmatic pacifists refuse to grant the same respect the other way. It is not an exaggeration to say that many of the dogmatic pacifists I've encountered have been fundamentalists, perceiving violence as a form of blasphemy (which it is within this culture if it flows up the hierarchy, and these particular fundamentalists have never been too picky about reaping the fiscal fruits of this cul-

ture's routine violence down the hierarchy), and refusing to allow any mention of violence in their presence. It's ironic, then, that they end up turning Audre Lorde's comment on its head.

Our survival really does depend on us learning how to "take our differences"—including violent and nonviolent approaches to stopping civilization from killing the planet—"and make them strengths." Yet these fundamentalists attempt to eradicate this difference, to disallow it, to force all discourse and all action into only one path: theirs. That's incredibly harmful, and of course serves those in power. The master's house will never be dismantled using only one tool, whether that tool is discourse, hammers, or high explosives.

I have many other problems with the pacifist use of the idea that force is solely the dominion of those in power. It's certainly true that the master uses the tool of violence, but that doesn't mean he owns it. Those in power have effectively convinced us they own land, which is to say they've convinced us to give up our inalienable right to access our own landbases. They've effectively convinced us they own conflict resolution methods (which they call *laws*), which is to say they've convinced us to give up our inalienable right to resolve our own conflicts (which they call *taking the law into your own hands*). They've convinced us they own water. They've convinced us they own the wild (the government could not offer "timber sales" unless we all agreed it owned the trees in the first place). They're in the process of convincing us they own the air. The state has for millennia been trying to convince us it owns a monopoly on violence, and abusers have been trying to convince us for far longer than that. Pacifists are more than willing to grant them that, and to shout down anyone who disagrees.

Well, I disagree. Violence does not belong exclusively to those at the top of the hierarchy, no matter how much abusers and their allies try to convince us. They have never convinced wild animals, including wild humans, and they will never convince me.

And who is it who says we should not use the master's tools? Often it is Christians, Buddhists, or other adherents of civilized religions. It is *locally* people who wish us to vote our way to justice or shop our way to sustainability. But civilized religions are tools used by the master as surely as is violence. So is voting. So is shopping. If we cannot use tools used by the master, what tools, precisely, can we use? How about writing? No, sorry. As I cited Stanley Diamond much earlier, writing has long been a tool used by the master. So I guess we can't use that. Well, how about discourse in general? Yes, those in power own the means of industrial discourse production, and those in power misuse discourse. Does that mean that our own all-discourse, all-discourse is one of the master's tools?

ulously escapes back to the planet about to be destroyed, where they're held by the peaceful protesters so they can be immediately and rightly turned over to troopers. That same writer comments in the margin, "Not only is it vital, once again, that the right message be sent to audience members by showing these rebels being put in a position to take responsibility for their actions, but it would also be terribly unrealistic to expect these peaceful rebels to put up with these actions that would simply give Darth Vader the excuse he needs to blow up the planet. The disrespectful hooligans *must* be turned over to the Empire promptly and without question."

Near the end of the movie another debate is held among the rebels. (One problem I had with this environmentalist screenplay was that there was a bit too much debate and not quite enough action.⁴⁷¹) As the Death Star looms directly overhead, a few of the rebels advocate picking up weapons to fight back. These rebels are generally shouted down by pacifist rebels, who argue that attacking those who run the Death Star is "just another example of the Empire's harmful philosophy coming in by the back door." They state that the rebels who want to fight back are simply being co-opted by the need to control things. If we want to change Darth Vader, they say, we must all first *become* the change. To change Darth Vader's heart, we must first change our own. We must above all else have compassion for Darth Vader, and remember that he, too, was once a child. One writer put in the margins: "Excellent! This will be sure to moisten the cheeks of sensitive people everywhere!" He did not mention whether or not these tears would be of frustration. Finally Leia, Luke, Han, Chewbacca, and a couple of robots show up and tell these others they've found a way to blow up the whole Death Star. The rest of the rebels—even those who'd previously been in favor of surgical strikes aimed at "removing" Darth Vader—are horrified. They point out that blowing up the Death Star will do nothing to change the hearts and minds of those who create Death Stars, and so will accomplish nothing. Han Solo replies, "It will stop this Death Star from destroying this planet!" The pacifist rebels are unmoved. They remind the unruly four that the Death Star has a crew of 265,675, plus 52,276 gunners, 607,360 troops, 25,984 stormtroopers, 42,782 ship support staff, and 167,216 pilots and support crew.⁴⁷² Each of these people on the Death Star has a family. Do you want to make their children orphans? The pacifists themselves begin to cry. (That same screenwriter comments: "If that doesn't yank the tears out of audience members' tiny ducts, I don't know what will!") They say, voices firm behind the sobs, "You cannot blow up the Death Star. What about the custodial engineers? What about

the Empire. Under no circumstances should the letters be such that they would alienate or anger Mr. Vader. If the letters upset Mr. Vader, the rebels' letter campaign to the Grand Moff Tarkin would certainly fail as well.") Other plans include sending petitions and filing lawsuits.

Now, you and I both know that all of this should be sufficient not only to bring the Empire to its knees but to make a damn fine and exciting movie. The thing is: there's more. Thousands of renegade rebels, unhappy with what they perceive as toadying on the part of the mainstream rebels, decide, in a scene guaranteed to bring tears to the eyes of even the most cold-hearted theatergoers, to ~~guard over the planets to be destroyed~~ link arms (or, in some cases, tentacles), and sing "Give Peace a Chance." They send DVDs of this to both Darth Vader and his boss the Grand Moff Tarkin, to whom they also send wave after wave of loving kindness™. Some few rebels sneak aboard the Death Star and lock themselves down to various pieces of equipment. (Early in this draft of the film, the screenwriters included a long scene showing the extensive training in nonviolent communication that is a prerequisite to joining the rebels. Most writers had originally, by the way, called it a rebel army, but several objected to the violence inherent in that word. Next came "rebel force," but nearly as many objected to that word as well. In any case, the nuanced scene of nonviolence training was dropped in later drafts and the infamous [and horribly violent] Cantina scene was, incomprehensibly to some, put in its place.⁴⁷⁰) Stirring debates are held onscreen among these rebels as to whether they should voluntarily surrender on approach of the troopers, or whether they should remain locked down to the end. In a brilliant and brave touch of authenticity, the rebels are never able to come to consensus.

The writers themselves entered into a debate as to whether the troopers should decapitate the locked-down rebels on or off screen, with one writer pleading that instead rebels must be explicitly shown being taken alive to interrogation cells: "Showing," he wrote in the margin, "or even implying that the troopers would ever commit these acts of violence, even in response to such obvious challenges to their authority as rebels *invading* their space and doing *violence* to their machinery by interfering with that machinery's lawful use would send absolutely the wrong message to theatergoers, and would give the wrong impression of Mr. Vader's ultimately peaceful intentions."

Once inside the Death Star, a splinter group breaks off from those about to lock themselves down. They rush down long hallways, somehow avoiding the myriad troopers. They burn a couple of transport ships, and use chemicals to etch "Galaxy Liberation Front" on the walls of the Death Star. This group mirac-

and we can never use it? Of course not. They also own the means of industrial religion production, and they misuse religion. Does that mean they own all religion—all religion is one of the master's tools—and we can never use it? Of course not. They own the means of industrial violence production, and they misuse violence. Does that mean they own all violence—all violence is one of the master's tools—and we can never use it? Of course not.

But I have yet another problem with the statement that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, which is that it's a terrible metaphor. It just doesn't work. The first and most necessary condition for a metaphor is that it make sense in the real world. This doesn't.

You can use a hammer to build a house, and you can use a hammer to take it down.

It doesn't matter whose hammer it is.

I'm guessing that Audre Lord, for all of her wonderful capabilities as a writer, thinker, activist, and human being never in her entire life dismantled a house. Had she done that, she could never have made up this metaphor, because you sure as hell can use the master's tools to dismantle his house.¹⁹⁹ And you can use the master's high explosives to dismantle the master's dam.

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There's an even bigger problem with the metaphor. What is perhaps its most fundamental premise? That the house belongs to the master. But there is no master, and there is no master's house. There are no master's tools. There is a person who believes himself a master. There is a house he claims is his. There are tools he claims as well. And there are those who still believe he is the master.

But there are others who do not buy into this delusion. There are those of us who see a man, a house, and tools. No more and no less.²⁰⁰

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Those in power are responsible for their choices, and I am responsible for mine. But I need to emphasize that I'm not responsible for the way my choices have been framed. If someone puts a gun to my head and gives me the choice of taking a bullet to the brain now or watching twelve straight hours of Dennis Miller, I don't think I could be held entirely responsible for taking the easy way out and telling the person to pull the trigger.

That's a joke (sort of), but the point is a serious one. I want to be clear: I am

responsible for the choices I make. I am also responsible for attempting to break the confines which narrowly limit my choices, whenever and wherever possible.

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The next argument I've often heard for pacifism is that it's much easier to make war than to make peace. I have to admit that the first ten or fifteen times I heard this I didn't understand it at all: whether war or peace is harder is irrelevant. It's easier to catch a fly with your bare hand than with your mouth, but does that mean it's somehow better or more moral to do the latter? It's easier to take out a dam with a sledgehammer than a toothpick, but doing the latter wouldn't make me a better person. An action's difficulty is entirely independent of its quality or morality.

The next ten or fifteen times I heard this phrase it seemed to be an argument for violent resistance. If I want to live in a world with wild salmon, and if I'm all for doing this the easiest way possible, they're telling me I should make war. Certainly we have enough difficulties ahead of us in stopping those who are killing the planet without adding difficulties just for the hell of it.

The next ten or fifteen times I heard it I started going all psychotherapeutic on those who said it, wondering what it is about these pacifists that causes them to believe struggle for struggle's sake is good. Sounds like a martyr complex to me. Or maybe misplaced Calvinism. I don't know.

But after I heard it another ten or fifteen times I decided I just don't care. The argument is nonsensical, and I don't want to waste time on it that I could put to better use, like working to bring down civilization.

If all they're saying, by the way, is that oftentimes creativity can make violence unnecessary, I wish they would just say that. I would have no problem with that, so long as we emphasize the word *oftentimes*.

It's tricky, though. Not many people take responsibility for their actions. Instead of recognizing that the framing conditions constrain their options and choosing from there, many instead *blame* the framing conditions for their choices. To take a patriarchal cliché of an unhappy family the miserable husband does not choose to have an affair, but is forced to by his wife's recalcitrance around sex: *I don't want to leave the marriage, nor do I want to lead a sexless life, so what am I going to do?* The miserable wife does not choose to live a sexless life, but is

ray-shielded thermal exhaust port led directly from the surface of the station into the heart of its colossal reactor. If the port could be breached by proton torpedoes, then the resulting chain reaction would destroy the station."⁴⁶⁷ We all know what happened next: By using the force, and with the help of Han Solo and Chewbacca, as well as the spirit of Obi-Wan Kenobi, Luke Skywalker was able to drop a proton torpedo right down the tiny port, and blow up the Death Star.

One small proton torpedo destroyed the Death Star. This would be a prime example of leveraging your power by using a properly placed fulcrum. In our case, to switch metaphors, where do we place the charges? Where is the correct thermal exhaust port? How do we start a chain reaction that will cause the "Death Star" before us to self-destruct?

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You know, don't you, that this wasn't the movie's original ending. I have in my hands an extremely rare early draft of the *Star Wars* film script, never before published.⁴⁶⁸ It may surprise you to learn that the early drafts were written by environmentalists.⁴⁶⁹ In this version, the rebels do not of course blow up the Death Star, but instead prefer to use other tactics to slow the intergalactic march of Empire. For example, they set up programs for people on planets about to be destroyed to produce luxury items like hemp hacky sacks and gourmet coffee for sale to inhabitants of the Death Star. Audience members will also discover that there are plans afoot to encourage loads of troopers and other citizens of the Empire to take ecotours of doomed planets. The purpose will be to show to one and all that these planets are economically important to the Empire and so should not be destroyed. In a surprise move that will rivet viewers to the edges of their seats, other groups of rebels file lawsuits against the Empire, attempting to show that the Environmental Impact Statement Darth Vader was required to file failed to adequately support its decision that blowing up this planet would cause "no significant impact." Viewers will thrill to learn of plans to boycott items produced by corporations that have Darth Vader on the board of directors, and will leap to their feet in theaters worldwide when they see bags full of letters written directly to Mr. Vader himself asking that he please not blow up anymore planets. (Scribbled in the margin is a note from one of the screenwriters: "For accuracy's sake, when we show examples of these letters, it is imperative that all letters to Mr. Vader be respectful and courteous, and that they stress

forced to by her husband's unwillingness or inability to communicate on any but a physical level: *I do not want to leave the marriage, nor do I want sex without intimacy, so what am I going to do?*

Similarly, I've never heard of an abuser saying, "I hit you because I wanted to terrorize you into submission." Instead he might say, "I wouldn't have hit you if you wouldn't have kept yelling and yelling and yelling at me about coming in so late." The framing conditions caused his violence. If we move this to a larger scale, how often have we heard politicians speak of the necessity of preemptive attacks on other countries (which just happen to sit atop coveted resources)? They rarely say, "I choose to invade this country." Instead they say they've been forced into this regrettable action by those they are about to subjugate, er, liberate. The Nazis played this same card—*everybody* plays this same card—they only invaded Poland because they had no choice; they only invaded the Soviet Union because they had no choice; they only killed *untermenschen* because they had no choice. Sigh. It's a terribly dirty job, but somebody's got to do it.

CEOs follow the same logic. If it were up to them, they would keep factories open (not that this is a good thing from the perspective of the planet, but within the confines of this culture most people consider it good), pay workers livable wages, maintain solid retirement programs, and so on. But you know how things are. They have no choice but to lay off workers and move the factories to Bangladesh, where they have no choice but to pay Bangladeshis eight cents per hour (as they themselves pull down a cool million per year, which converts to about five hundred dollars per hour, or more in one minute than they pay a Bangladeshi for a hundred hours). And if the Bangladeshis complain, the CEOs will have no choice but to move the factory on to Vietnam. Market pressures, you know. And these same market pressures force them to pollute, to clearcut, to overfish.

I'm sorry, each and every one of us can say, we have no choice but to destroy the planet. It's really not our fault.

Bullshit.

We may as well acknowledge that our entire culture—from top to bottom, inside out, personally and socially—is founded on, motivated by, and requires a systematic and absolute avoidance of responsibility. This is true both for our actions and our failures to act. What, ultimately, is environmental degradation? Any and all environmental degradation is a manifestation and a consequence of avoidance of responsibility. What is pollution? It is a manifestation and a consequence of avoidance of responsibility. What is overfishing? Deforestation? They are manifestations and consequences of avoidance of responsibility.²⁰¹

I WENT TO SEE STAR WARS WHEN I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL, WHICH SEEMS about the right time to see it. I liked it a lot. I wasn't one of those people who saw it a hundred times or anything. I wasn't *that* much of a nerd. Besides, I was too busy playing *Dungeons and Dragons*. I saw it again recently. It's not so good as I remember. In fact it's pretty bad. The characters are flat, the dialog hokey, the acting nondescript. But I still loved the ending, where Luke remembers to "use the force" to blow up the Death Star. For those of you who may have forgotten, the Death Star (according to the official *Star Wars* website) "was the code name of an unspeakably powerful and horrific weapon developed by the Empire. The immense space station carried a weapon capable of destroying entire planets. The Death Star was to be an instrument of terror, meant to cow treasonous worlds with the threat of annihilation. While the massive station is evidence of the evil that was the Galactic Empire, it was also proof of the New Order's greatest weakness—the belief that technology and terror were superior to the will of oppressed beings fighting for freedom." That's all pretty interesting stuff, and of course applicable to the discussion at hand: civilization as Death Star.

The website also says, "The Death Star was a battle station the size of a small moon. It had a formidable array of turbolasers and tractor beam projectors, giving it the firepower of greater than half the Imperial Starfleet. Within its cavernous interior were legions of Imperial troops and fighters, as well as all manner of detention blocks and interrogation cells. The Death Star was spherical, and dark gray in color. Located on the Death Star's northern hemisphere was a concave disk housing the station's main laser weapon.... In a brutal display of the Death Star's power, Grand Moff Tarkin targeted its prime weapon at the peaceful world of Alderaan. [Rebel princess] Leia Organa, an Imperial captive at the time, was forced to watch as the searing laser blast split apart her beloved world, turning the planet and its populace into orbital ash and debris." I'm not sure if you feel a stab of recognition at being a captive of the empire, forced to watch your beloved world and its (human and nonhuman) populace turned into orbital ash and debris. I do.

The website continues, "Using... stolen technical data, [rebel] Alliance tacticians were able to pinpoint a crucial flaw in the Death Star's design. A small

And what is our failure to stop each of these things? It's just as much an avoidance of responsibility.

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We must, we are told, visualize world peace. My first thought on hearing this is always that the abused spouse is so often told that if she can just love her husband enough, he might change. Meanwhile her daughter may very well be wishing she gets a pony for Christmas, but that isn't going to happen either. My second thought on hearing this is always that visualizing world peace is essentially the semi-secular new age equivalent of praying.

All that said, I have to admit that I actually *am* a huge fan of visualization. I just normally call it daydreaming. When I was a high jumper in college, I used to more or less constantly picture myself floating over the bar. I'd do this in the shower, driving, walking to classes, certainly all through my classes. Later when I coached high jumping I used to guide my students through visualizations as a routine part of our practice. Now I constantly daydream about my writing. And more importantly I visualize people fighting back. I visualize people knocking down dams. I visualize them taking down the oil and electrical infrastructures. I visualize wild salmon returning in greater numbers every year. I visualize migratory songbirds coming back. I even visualize passenger pigeons returning. So I guess I don't have a problem with visualizing world peace, so long as people are also working for it. Except that as I made clear early on, civilization requires the importation of resources, which means it requires the use of force to maintain itself. This means that if these folks who are visualizing world peace really are interested in actualizing world peace, they should also be visualizing industrial collapse. And bringing it about.

But I don't think most of the people with "Visualize World Peace" bumper stickers on their old Saabs are interested in doing the work to take down civilization. It's too messy. I keep thinking about that line by Gandhi, "We want freedom for our country, but not at the expense or exploitation of others." I've also had this line crammed down my throat more times than I want to consider—often phrased as "You keep saying that in this struggle for the planet that you want to win, but if someone wins, doesn't that mean someone has to lose, and isn't that just perpetuating the same old dominator mindset?"—and I've always found it both intellectually dishonest and poorly thought-out.

A man tries to rape a woman. She runs away. Her freedom from being raped

STAR WARS

"Twaddle, rubbish, and gossip is what people want, not action. . . . The secret of life is to chatter freely about all one wishes to do and how one is always being prevented—and then do nothing."

Søren Kierkegaard¹⁶⁶

only have saved either the life they were going to lose anyway, or the lives of others."²²² And, "Inertia it was that led millions of Jews into the ghettos the SS had created for them. It was inertia that made hundreds of thousands of Jews sit home, waiting for their executioners."²²³

Ward Churchill sums up Bettelheim's description of this inertia, which Bettelheim "considers the basis for Jewish passivity in the face of genocide, as being grounded in a profound desire for 'business as usual,' the following of rules, the need to not accept reality or to act upon it. Manifested in the irrational belief that in remaining 'reasonable and responsible,' unobtrusively resisting by continuing 'normal' day-to-day activities proscribed by the nazis through the Nuremberg Laws and other infamous legislation, and not alienating anyone, this attitude implied that a more-or-less humane Jewish policy might be morally imposed upon the nazi state by Jewish pacifism itself."²²⁴

Bettelheim observes that "we all wish to subscribe to this business-as-usual philosophy, and forget that it hastens our own destruction," and that we have a "wish to forget the gas chambers and to glorify the attitude of going on with business as usual, even in a holocaust."²²⁵

But remember, the Jews who participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, even those who went on what they thought were suicide missions, had a higher rate of survival than those who did not fight back. Never forget that.

Instead of saying, "If we fight back, we run the risk of becoming like they are. If we fight back, we run the risk of destroying our souls," we must say, "If we do not fight, we run the risk of not just acting like but *becoming* slaves. If we do not fight back, we run the risk of destroying our souls and our dignity. If we do not fight back, we run the risk of allowing those who are exterminating the world to move ever faster."

him? Of course not. Now let's do this again. He tries to rape her. She can't get away. She tries to stop him nonviolently. It doesn't work. She pulls a gun and shoots him in the head. Obviously her freedom from being raped came at the expense of his life. Did she exploit him? Of course not. It all comes back to what I wrote earlier in this book: defensive rights *always* trump offensive rights. My right to freedom always trumps your right to exploit me, and if you do try to exploit me, I have the right to stop you, even at some expense to you.

All of this leads us to the fuzzy thinking. Anybody's freedom from being exploited will *always* come at the expense of the oppressor's ability to exploit. The freedom of salmon (and rivers) to survive will come at the expense of those who profit from dams. The freedom of ancient redwood forests to survive will come at the expense of Charles Hurwitz's bank account. The freedom of the world to survive global warming will come at the expense of those whose lifestyles are based on the burning of oil. It is magical thinking to pretend otherwise.



Every choice carries with it costs. If you want air conditioning, you (and many others) are going to have to pay for it. If you want automobiles, you (and many others) are going to have to pay for them. If you want industrial civilization, you (and many others) are going to have to pay for it.

If you want freedom, you will have to fight for it and those who are exploiting you are going to have to pay for it. If you want a livable planet, at this point you will have to fight for it and those who are killing the planet are going to have to pay for it.



Schiller's line, too, that "Peace is rarely denied to the peaceful," is more magical thinking, and the people who spout it really should be ashamed of themselves. What about the Arawaks, Semay, Mbuti, Hopi? Peace has been denied them. What about the peaceful women who are raped? What about the peaceful children who are abused? What about salmon? What about rivers? What about redwood trees? What about bison? What about prairie dogs? What about passenger pigeons? I hate to steal a line from someone so odious as John Stossel, but give me a break.

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Sometimes this book scares me. I'm calling for people to bring down civilization. This will not be bloodless. This will not be welcomed by most of the civilized. But I do not see any other realistic options. I cannot stand by while the world is destroyed. And I see no hope for reform. This is true whether we talk about the lack of realistic possibility of psychological or social reform, or whether we talk about the structural impossibilities of civilization (which requires the importation of resources) ever being sustainable. And really, think about it for a moment: this culture is changing the climate—*changing the climate*—and those in power are doing nothing to stop it. In fact they're burning more oil each year than the year before. If changing the earth's climate is not enough to make them change their ways, nothing will. Nothing. Not petitions, not letters, not votes, not the purchase of hemp hacksacks. Not visualizations. Not sending them love. Nothing. They will not change. They must be stopped. Through any means necessary. We are talking about the life of the planet. They must be stopped.

This scares me.

I sent a note saying all this to my publisher, who wrote me back, "Nothing could be scarier than this culture. I dare you to scare me."

Back to work.

« « «

The next pacifist argument is that the ends never justify the means. While adding the word *almost* just before the word *never* makes this true for many trivial ends—I would not, for example, be willing to destroy a landbase so I can magnify my bank account—it's nonsense when it comes to self-defense. Are the people who spout this line saying that the ends of not being raped never justify the means of killing one's assailant? Are they saying that the ends of saving salmon—who have survived for millions of years—and sturgeon—who have survived since the time of the dinosaurs—never justify the means of removing dams without waiting for approval from those who are saying they wish salmon would go extinct so we can get on with living [*sic*]? Are they saying that the ends of children free from pesticide-induced cancer and mental retardation are not worth whatever means may be necessary? If so, their sentiments are obscene. We're not playing some theoretical, spiritual, or philo-

should not. In fact in some cases it may be far more harmful. The Indians who spoke of fighting, killing, and dying—and who fought, killed, and died—to protect not only their land but their dignity from theft by the civilized understood this. So did Zapata. So did the Jews who rose up against the Nazis. Of those who rose up against their exterminators at Auschwitz/Birkenau, and who were able to kill seventy SS, destroy one crematoria, and severely damage another, concentration camp survivor Bruno Bettelheim²⁷ wrote that "they did only what we would expect all human beings to do: to use their death, if they could not save their lives, to weaken or hinder the enemy as much as possible; to use even their doomed selves for making extermination harder, or maybe impossible, not a smooth running process. . . . If they could do it, so could others. Why didn't they? Why did they throw their lives away instead of making things hard for the enemy? Why did they make a present of their very being to the SS instead of to their families, their friends, even to fellow prisoners; this is the haunting question."²⁸ Bettelheim also wrote, this specifically of Anne Frank's family, "There is little doubt that the Franks, who were able to provide themselves with so much, could have provided themselves with a gun or two had they wished. They could have shot down one or two of the SS men who came for them. There was no surplus of SS men. The loss of an SS with every Jew arrested would have noticeably hindered the functioning of the police state."²⁹ Bettelheim—and he is joined by many in this—states explicitly that such actions could most likely have slowed the extermination process. Ward Churchill responds, "It should be noted that similar revolts in Sobibór and Treblinka in 1943 were even more effective than the one at Auschwitz/Birkenau a few months later; Sobibór had to be closed altogether, a reality that amplifies and reinforces Bettelheim's rather obvious point."³⁰

Bettelheim comments, in words he could have written about us as we watch our TVs and wait for the end of the world, "The persecution of the Jews was aggravated, slow step by slow step, when no violent fighting back occurred. It may have been Jewish acceptance, without retaliatory fight, of ever harsher discrimination and degradation that first gave the SS the idea that they could be gotten to the point where they would walk into the gas chambers on their own. Most Jews who did not believe in business-as-usual survived the Second World War. As the Germans approached, they left everything behind and fled to Russia, much as many of them distrusted the Soviet system. . . . Those who stayed on to continue business-as-usual moved toward their own destruction and perished. Thus in the deepest sense the walk to the gas chamber was only the last consequence of a philosophy of business-as-usual."³¹

Bettelheim also writes, in words that are just as applicable, "Rebellion could

entirely on who they were killing; they regretted some of their murders, but wouldn't take back others even if it meant they could get out of prison. One man, for example, overheard a rapist bragging how he'd made his victim tell him she liked it, and made her beg for more so he wouldn't kill her. The man I spoke with invited the rapist into his cell for a friendly game of chess, and strangled him to death because of what he did to that woman. That murder had felt right at the time, he said, and he knew it would feel right for the next fifteen years till he got out. And one man told me that the thing he was most proud of in his entire life was that he killed three people."

The pacifist shook his head. "That's really sick," he said.

"Let me tell you the story," I responded. "He was a migrant farm worker, from a large Mexican family. He was fifteen. One day he didn't go to the fields but to town. That day three men killed his father. Soon there was a family meeting, and he violated family tradition by interrupting his elders. He insisted that because he was the youngest, the only one without a family relying on him, that he be the one to avenge their father. For the next few years he worked hard to establish a business that would support his mother later on, and when the time came he killed the three men who had killed his father. The next day he went to the police station and turned himself in. He's now serving life."

"He should have let the law handle it."

"I cannot blame him for his actions. They were human." I paused a moment, then said, "And I have known others who killed because they were human. I have known women who killed their abusers. They had no regrets. Not one. Not ever."

"You cannot sway me," he said. "They should let the law handle it."

"The law," I replied. "The law. Let me tell you another story. A woman killed her mother's boyfriend, who had battered her mother for years and finally murdered her mother. And—surprise of all surprises—the district attorney refused to charge him with murder. I suppose this was because women aren't people whose lives actually count. So the woman did a sit-in at the DA's office. For three days, she just kept saying over and over 'You're going to call it murder.' The DA finally had her arrested for trespassing. Having gotten no satisfaction from the system, she bought a gun, tracked the boyfriend down and shot him dead. Because of her sit-in stunt, the lawyers were able to argue temporary insanity. She served two years in prison and didn't regret a single day of it."²¹⁶

The pacifists who say that fighting back against those who are exploiting you or those you love destroys your soul have it all backwards. It is just as wrong and just as harmful to not fight back when one should as it is to fight when one

children. We're talking about a planet being killed. I will do whatever is necessary to defend those I love.

Those who say that ends *never* justify means are of necessity either sloppy thinkers, hypocrites, or just plain wrong. If ends *never* justify means, can these people ride in a car? They are by their actions showing that their ends of getting from one place to another justify the means of driving, which means the costs of using oil, with all the evils carried with it. The same is true for the use of any metal, wood, or cloth products, and so on. You could make the argument that the same is true for the act of eating. After all, the ends of keeping yourself alive through eating evidently justify the means of taking the lives of those you eat. Even if you eat nothing but berries, you are depriving others—from birds to bacteria—of the possibility of eating those particular berries.

You could say I'm reducing this argument to absurdity, but I'm not the one who made the claim that ends *never* justify means. If they want to back off the word *never*, we can leave the realm of dogma and begin a reasonable discussion of what ends we feel justify what means. I suspect, however, that this would soon lead to another impasse, because my experience of "conversations" with pacifists is that beneath the use of this phrase oftentimes is an unwillingness to take responsibility for one's own actions coupled with the same old hubris that declares that humans are separate from and better than the rest of the planet. Witness the pacifist who said to me that he would not harm a single human to save an entire run of salmon. He explicitly states—and probably consciously believes—that ends *never* justify means, but what he really means is that no humans must be harmed by anyone trying to help a landbase or otherwise bringing about social change.

I sometimes get accused of hypocrisy because I use high technology as a tool to try to dismantle technological civilization. While there are certainly ways I'm a hypocrite, that's not one of them, because I have never claimed that the ends *never* justify the means. I have stated repeatedly that I'll do whatever's necessary to save salmon. That's not code language for blowing up dams. Whatever's necessary for me includes writing, giving talks, using computers, rehabilitating streams, singing songs to the salmon, *and* whatever else may be appropriate.

Setting rhetoric aside, there is simply no factual support for the statement that ends don't justify means, because it's a statement of values disguised as a statement of morals. A person who says ends don't justify means is simply saying: I value process more than outcome. Someone who says ends do justify means is merely saying: I value outcome more than process. Looked at this way, it becomes absurd to make absolute statements about it. There are some ends that

justify some means, and there are some ends that do not. Similarly, the same means may be justified by some people for some ends and not justified by or for others (I would, for example, kill someone who attempted to kill those I love, and I would not kill someone who tried to cut me off on the interstate). It is my joy, responsibility, and honor as a sentient being to make those distinctions, and I pity those who do not consider themselves worthy or capable of making them themselves, and who must rely on slogans instead to guide their actions.

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It's pretty clear to me that our horror of violence is actually a deep terror of responsibility. We don't have issues with someone being killed. We have issues about unmediated killing, about doing it ourselves. And of course we have issues with violence flowing the wrong way up the hierarchy.

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Erasmus's statement, "The most disadvantageous peace is better than the most just war," used to strike me as insane and cowardly (not that this was true of all Erasmus's work). Now I just say I disagree.

Gandhi came out with a different version of this when he said, "My marriage to non-violence is such an absolute thing that I would rather commit suicide than be deflected from my position." I guess there are ways I can understand this, in that there are things I would kill myself rather than do. But this statement seems inflexible to the point of insanity. Is he saying that if he had the opportunity to stop a rape/murder, but could do so only through physically stopping the assailant, he would kill himself (and let the other person be raped/murdered) rather than break his sacred vow to non-violence? Is he saying that if he had the opportunity to stop the murder of the planet, but could do so only through physically stopping the assailants, he would kill himself (and let the planet be murdered) rather than violate his sacred vow to non-violence?

Unfortunately, he does seem to be saying these things. Now it's true that Gandhi perceived cowardice as worse even than violence (and please note that while I'm accusing Gandhi of fuzzy thinking, naiveté, and, as you'll see in a while, misogyny, never would I accuse him of cowardice: the man was stone cold brave), saying, for example, "Where the choice is between only violence and cowardice, I would advise violence," and "To take the name of non-violence when there is a sword in your heart is not only hypocritical

became like the Nazis. It is obscene to suggest that a tiger who kills a human at a zoo becomes like one of her captors.

Related to that is the notion that committing an act of violence destroys your soul. A couple of years ago I shared a stage with another dogmatic pacifist. He said, "To harm another human being irretrievably damages your very core."

I didn't think Tecumseh would have agreed. I asked, "How do you know?" He shook his head. "I don't know what you're asking."

"How do you know that violence irretrievably damages your very core?"

He looked at me as though I had just asked him how he knows that gravity exists.

I asked, "Have you ever killed anyone?"

"Of course not."

"So you don't know this by direct experience. Have any of your friends ever killed anyone?"

Disgust crossed his face. "Of course not."

"Have you ever even spoken with anyone who has killed someone?"

"No."

"So your statement is an article of faith, unsupported, based not on direct experience or conversations with anyone who would know."

He said, "It's self-evident."

Nice rhetorical trick, I thought. I said, "I have friends at the prison who've killed people, and I'm acquaintances with many others who've done the same. Because I've heard so many pacifists make this claim before, I asked these men if killing really changed them."

He didn't look at me. He certainly didn't ask about their answers.

I told him anyway. "The answers are unpredictable, and as varied as the people themselves. A few were devastated, just as you suggest. Not many, but a few. A bunch said it didn't fundamentally change anything. They were still the exact same people they were before. One said he'd been stunned by how easy it is, physically, to take someone's life, and that made him realize how easily he, too, could be killed. The act of killing made him feel very frightened, he said. Another said it made him feel incredibly powerful, and it felt really, really good. Another said the first time was hard, but after that it quickly became easy."

The pacifist looked like he was going to throw up.

I thought, *This is just reality, man. Reality is a lot more complex than any dogma could ever be. That's one of the problems with abstract principles: they're always smaller and simpler than life, and the only way to make life fit your abstractions is to cut off great parts of it*. I said "A few told me their answers depended

I'VE HEARD TOO MANY PACIFISTS SAY THAT VIOLENCE ONLY BEGETS VIOLENCE. This is manifestly not true. Violence can beget many things. Violence can beget submission, as when a master beats a slave (some slaves will eventually fight back, in which case this violence will beget more violence; but some slaves will submit for the rest of their lives, as we see; and some will even create a religion or spirituality that attempts to make a virtue of their submission, as we also see; some will write and others repeat that the most disadvantageous peace is better than the most just war; some will speak of the need to love their oppressors; and some will say that the meek shall inherit what's left of the earth). Violence can beget material wealth, as when a robber or a capitalist²¹⁴ steals from someone. Violence can beget violence, as when someone attacks someone who fights back. Violence can beget a cessation of violence, as when someone fights off or kills an assailant (it's utterly nonsensical as well as insulting to say that a woman who kills a rapist is begetting more violence).

Back to Gandhi: "We must be the change we wish to see." This ultimately meaningless statement manifests the magical thinking and narcissism we've come to expect from dogmatic pacifists. I can change myself all I want, and if dams still stand, salmon still die. If global warming proceeds apace, birds still starve. If factory trawlers still run, oceans still suffer. If factory farms still pollute, dead zones still grow. If vivisection labs still remain, animals are still tortured.

I have worked very hard to become emotionally healthy, to heal from this culture, my childhood, and my schooling. I'm a genuinely nice guy. But I don't do that emotional work to try to help salmon. I do it to make life better for myself and those around me. My emotional health doesn't help salmon one bit, except insofar as that health leads me to dismantle that which is killing them. This is not cognitively challenging at all.

Next: If you use violence against exploiters, you become like they are. This cliché is, once again, absurd, with no relation to the real world. It is based on the flawed notion that all violence is the same.²¹⁵ It is obscene to suggest that a woman who kills a man attempting to rape her becomes like a rapist. It is obscene to suggest that by fighting back Tecumseh became like those who were stealing his people's land. It is obscene to suggest that the Jews at who fought back against their exterminators at Auschwitz/Birkenau, Treblinka, and Sobibor

and dishonest but cowardly." Even more to the point—and if all of Gandhi's words were this great he'd certainly be *my* hero—he said, "Though violence is not lawful, when it is offered in self-defence or for the defence of the defenceless, it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission. The latter befits neither man nor woman. Under violence, there are many stages and varieties of bravery. Every man must judge this for himself. No other person can or has the right." And here's one I like even more: "I have been repeating over and over again that he who cannot protect himself or his nearest and dearest or their honour by nonviolently facing death may and ought to do so by violently dealing with the oppressor. He who can do neither of the two is a burden. He has no business to be the head of a family. He must either hide himself, or must rest content to live forever in helplessness and be prepared to crawl like a worm at the bidding of a bully."

But damn if he doesn't follow this up with more of that old time pacifist religion. His very next paragraph is: "The strength to kill is not essential for self-defence; one ought to have the strength to die. When a man is fully ready to die, he will not even desire to offer violence. Indeed, I may put it down as a self-evident proposition that the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die. And history is replete with instances of men who, by dying with courage and compassion on their lips, converted the hearts of their violent opponents."

Let's do a little exegesis. Sentence one: "The strength to kill is not essential for self-defence; one ought to have the strength to die." Problem: Although this makes a good sound bite, it also makes no sense. The first clause is a statement of faith (why does this not surprise me?), logically and factually unsupported and insupportable yet presented as a statement of fact. The same is true for the second. Perhaps worse, if one of the purposes of self-defence is to actually defend oneself (to keep oneself from harm, even from death), then saying that self-defence requires the strength to die becomes exactly the sort of Orwellian absurdity we've all by now become far too familiar with from pacifists: *self-defence requires the strength to allow self-destruction, and self-destruction requires strength* take their fine place alongside *freedom is slavery, war is peace, and ignorance is strength*. His sentence would imply that the Jews who walked into the showers or laid down so they could be shot in the nape of the neck by members of *einsatzgruppen* were actually acting in their own self-defence. Nonsense. Now sentence two: "When a man is fully ready to die, he will not even desire to offer violence." Once again, a statement of faith, logically and factually unsupported and insupportable yet presented as a statement of fact. I have read hundreds of accounts of soldiers and others (including mothers) who were fully prepared to

die who sold their lives as dearly as possible. Sentence three: "Indeed, I may put it down as a self-evident proposition that the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die." This is actually a pretty cheap rhetorical trick on his part. Any writer knows that if you label something as self-evident people are less likely to examine it, or even if they do and find themselves disagreeing with it, they're prone to feeling kind of stupid: *If it's so self-evident, how stupid must I be to not see it the same way?* A far more sophisticated and accurate examination of the relationship between a desire to kill and a desire to die was provided earlier in this book by Luis Rodriguez. Oftentimes a desire to kill *springs from* a desire to die. It's certainly true that the dominant culture—I've heard it called a thanatocracy—manifests a collective desire to kill self and other. But there is something far deeper and far more creepy going on with this sentence. Read it again: "Indeed, I may put it down as a self-evident proposition that the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die." Let's pretend it's true. It is Gospel. You have never in your life read anything so true as this. Now let's ask ourselves whether Gandhi had a desire to kill. The answer is pretty obviously absolutely not. He said as much many times. What, then, does that mean Gandhi had a desire to do? If we take him at his word, it means he had a correspondingly absolute desire to die. He has an absolute death wish. Suddenly I understand why he would rather kill himself than break his marriage to non-violence. Suddenly I understand his more or less constant rhetoric of self-sacrifice. Suddenly I understand his body hatred (we'll get to this in a moment). Suddenly I understand why Gandhi—and by extension so many other pacifists who are drawn to his teachings—was so often so little concerned with actual physical change in the real physical world. Pacifism as death wish. And don't blame me for this one, folks: it's nothing more than a strict literal interpretation of Gandhi's own text. Gandhi repeatedly stated his absolute desire to not kill, and stated here explicitly: "the desire to kill is in inverse proportion to the desire to die."

But that isn't even what bothered me most about his paragraph. Sentence four horrified and appalled me: "And history is replete with instances of men who, by dying with courage and compassion on their lips, converted the hearts of their violent opponents." If Gandhi's statement contained a shred of evidence to support it, the Nazis would have quickly stopped, domestic violence would cease,²⁰² the civilized would not kill the indigenous, factory farms would not exist, vivisection labs would be torn down brick by brick. Worse, by saying this, Gandhi joins the long list of allies of abusers by subtly blaming victims for per-

PACIFISM, PART II

The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. In the light of these ideas, Negroes will be hunted at the North, and held and flogged at the South so long as they submit to those devilish outrages, and make no resistance, either moral or physical. Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others.

Frederick Douglass²⁰³

compassionately enough, I could have converted my murderer and kept him from killing again. It's all my fault. Nonsense. Many killers—and nearly all exploiters—would vastly prefer intended victims not resist. The overwhelming preponderance of evidence just doesn't support Gandhi's position.

And his position leads him into (even more) grotesque absurdity. During World War II, as Japan invaded Myanmar (then called Burma), Gandhi recommended that if India were invaded, the Japanese be allowed to take as much as they want. The most effective way for the Indians to resist the Japanese, he said, would be to "make them feel that they are not wanted."²⁰³ I am not making this up. Nor am I choosing one out-of-character statement. Gandhi urged the British to surrender to the Nazis, and recommended that instead of fighting back, both Czechs and Jews should have committed mass suicide (death wish, anyone?). In 1946, with full knowledge of the extent of the Holocaust, Gandhi told his biographer Louis Fisher, "The Jews should have offered themselves to the butcher's knife. They should have thrown themselves into the sea from cliffs."²⁰⁴

This is—and all you pacifists can get your gasps out of the way right now—both despicable and insane.

The insanity continues. If you recall, Gandhi said, "Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love."²⁰⁵ By now you should be able to spot the premises that, like any good propagandist, he's trying to slide by you. Violence is something humankind "has to get out of." Nonviolence is the only way to accomplish this. Hatred is something that needs to be overcome. Love is the only way to accomplish that.

These premises are statements of faith. They are utterly unsupported and unsupportable in the real world, and they are extremely harmful. Let's go back to the same basic example we've been using. A man breaks into a woman's home. He pulls out a knife. He is going to rape and kill her. She has a gun. Perhaps if she just shows him by shining example the beauty of nonviolence, perhaps if she dies with courage and compassion on her lips—or if she offers herself to the butcher's knife or throws herself into the sea from a cliff—she will convert his heart and he will realize the error of his ways and repent, to go and rape no more. Perhaps not. If she guesses wrong, she dies. And so do the rapist's next victims.

Gandhi's statement reveals an almost total lack of understanding of both abusive and psychopathological dynamics. His comment is one of the worst things you can say to anyone in an abusive situation, and one of the things abusers most want to hear. As I mentioned earlier, among the most powerful allies of abusers are those who say to victims, "You should show him some compassion even if he



has done bad things. Don't forget that he is a human, too."²⁰⁶ As Lundy Bancroft commented, "To suggest to her that his need for compassion should come before her right to live free from abuse is consistent with the abuser's outlook. I have repeatedly seen the tendency among friends and acquaintances of an abused woman to feel that it is their responsibility to make sure that she realizes *what a good person he really is inside*—in other words, to stay focused on his needs rather than her own, which is a mistake."²⁰⁷ I want to underscore that Gandhi's perspective is, following Bancroft, "consistent with the abuser's outlook."

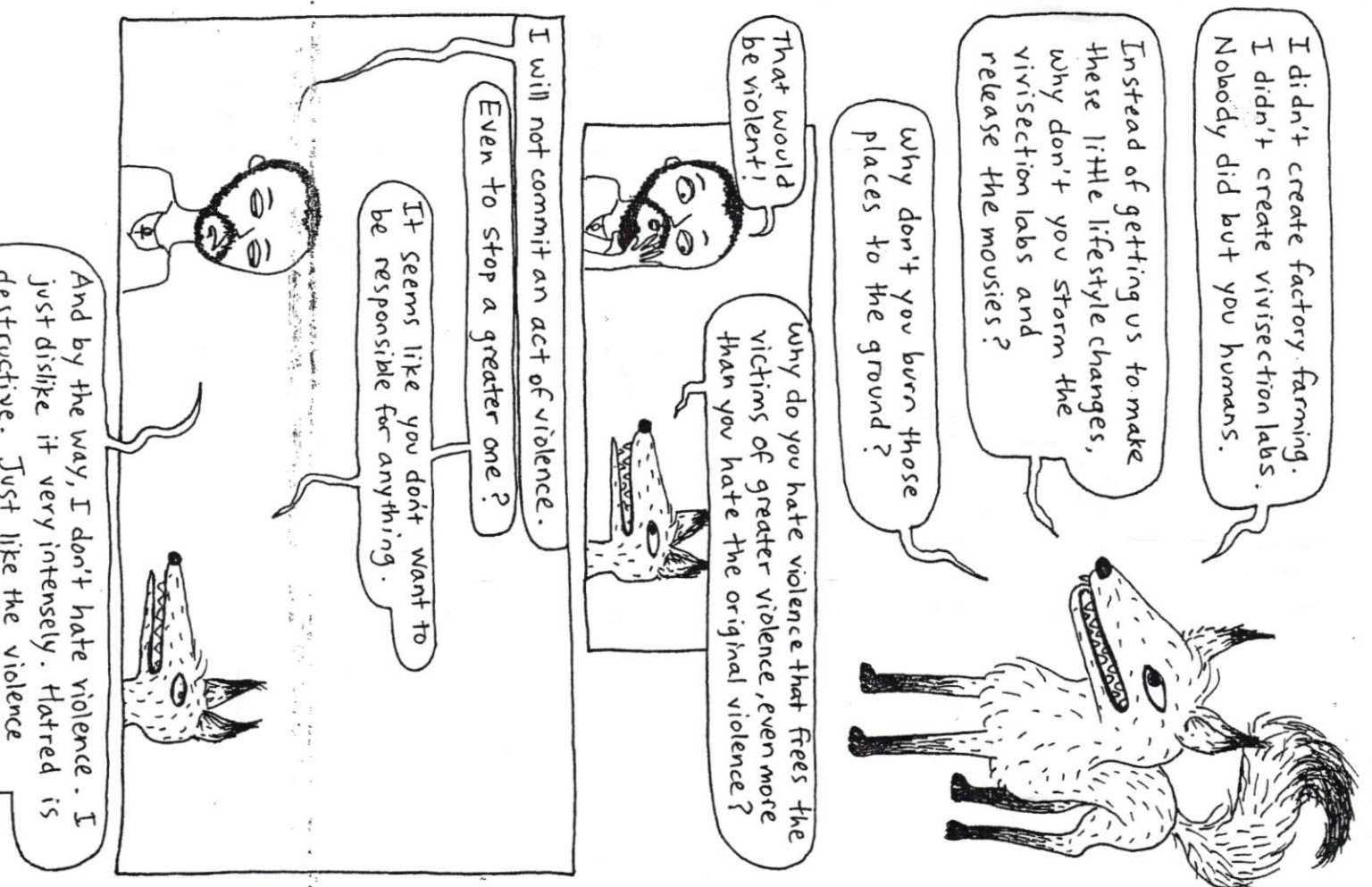
Too often pacifists have said to me, "When you look at a CEO, you are looking at yourself. He's a part of you, and you're a part of him. If you ever hope to reach him, you must recognize the CEO in your own heart, and you must reach out with compassion to this CEO in your heart, and to the CEO in the boardroom." It's revealing that none of these pacifists have ever said to me, "When you look at a clearcut, you are looking at yourself. It is a part of you, and you are a part of it. If you ever hope to help it, you must recognize the clearcut in your own heart, and you must reach out with compassion to this clearcut in your heart, and to the clearcut on the ground." The same is true for tuna, rivers, mountainsides. It's remarkable that pacifists tell me to look at the killer and see myself, while never telling me to look at the victim and see myself: they are telling me to identify with the killer, not the victim. This happens so consistently that I have come to understand it's no accident, but reveals with whom the people who say it do and do not themselves identify (and fear).

So far as psychopaths, Gandhi ignores their first characteristic: a "callous unconcern for the feelings of others." Far worse, he fails to understand that some people are unreachable. He wrote Hitler a letter requesting he change his ways, and was evidently surprised when Hitler didn't listen to him.

His statement also ignores the role of entitlement in atrocity. I can love Charles Hurwitz all I want, I can nonviolently write letters and nonviolently sit in trees, and so long as he feels entitled to destroy forests to pad his bank account, and so long as he is backed by the full power of the state, within this social structure, none of that will cause him to change in the slightest. Nor, and this is the point, will it help the forests. Similarly, so long as men feel entitled to control women, loving them won't change them, nor will it help women.

There's yet another problem with Gandhi's statement, which is that he has made the same old unwarranted conflation of love and nonviolence on one hand, and hatred and violence on the other.

There is a sense in which the last sentence—and only the last sentence—of

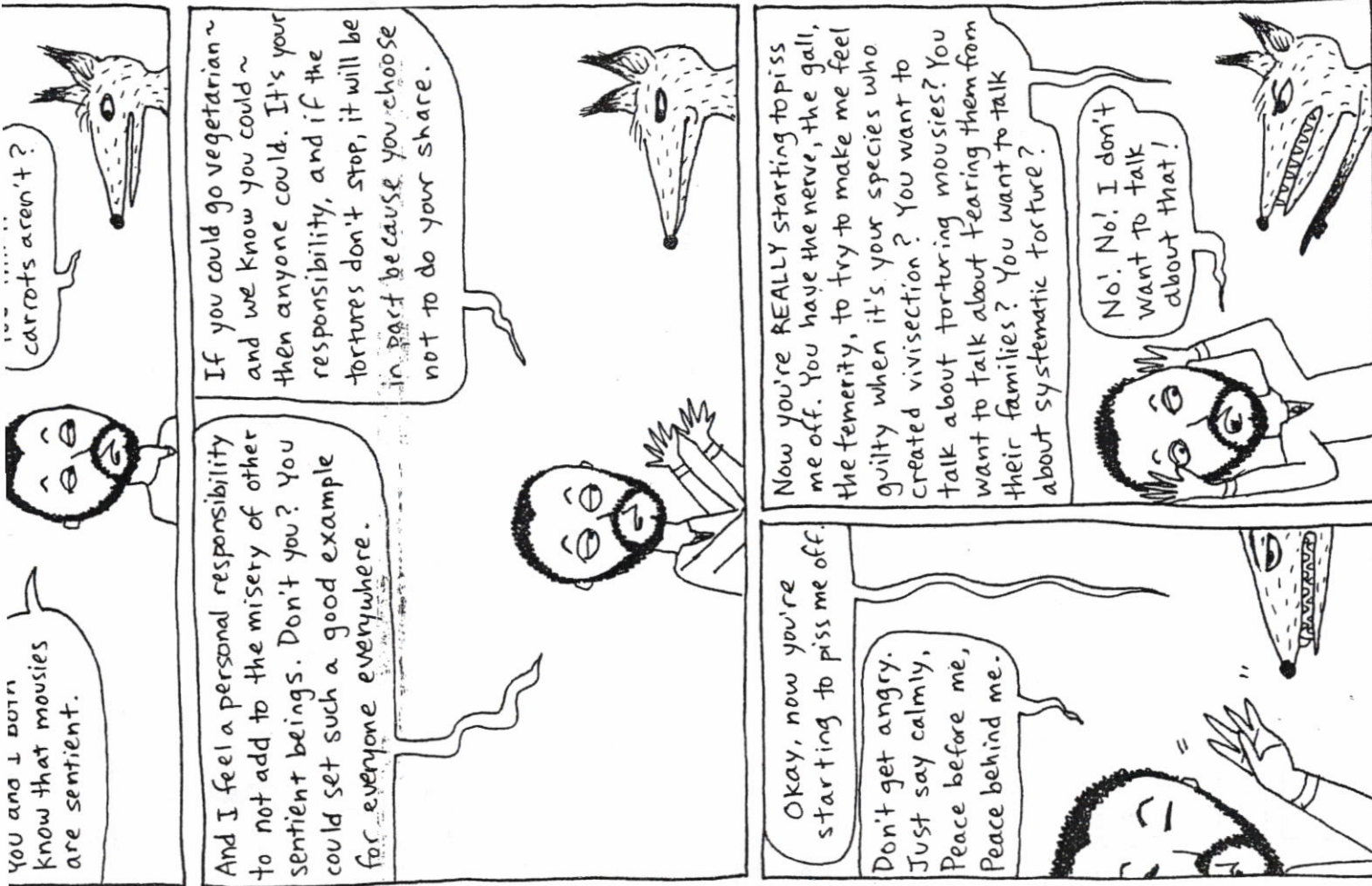


saying, "Hatred can be overcome only by love," we could say, "If someone hates you, your best and most appropriate and most powerful responses will come out of a sense of self-love." I like that infinitely better. It's far more accurate, intellectually honest, useful, flexible, and applicable across a wide range of circumstances. But there's the key right there, isn't it? Within this culture we're all taught to hate ourselves (and to identify with our oppressors, who hate us, too, and call it love).

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This leads to the next line by Gandhi often tossed around by pacifists: "When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but in the end, they always fall—Think of it, ALWAYS."²⁰⁸

You know how there are some people whose work you're supposed to respect because everyone else seems to? And you know how at least with some of these people your respect fades over time, slowly, with each new piece of information that you gain? And you know how sometimes you feel you must be crazy, or a bad person, or you must be missing something, because everyone keeps telling you how great this person is, and you just don't get it? And you know how you keep fighting to maintain your respect for this person, but the information keeps coming in, until at long last you just can't do it anymore? That's how it was with me and Gandhi. I lost a lot of respect when I learned some of the comments I've mentioned here. I lost more when I learned that because he opposed Western medicine, he didn't want his wife to take penicillin, even at risk to her life, because it would be administered with a hypodermic needle; yet this opposition did not extend to himself: he took quinine and was even operated on for appendicitis. I lost yet more when I learned that he was so judgmental of his sons that he disowned his son Harilal (who later became an alcoholic) because he disapproved of the woman Harilal chose to marry. When his other son, Manilal, loaned money to Harilal, Gandhi disowned him, too. When Manilal had an affair with a married woman, Gandhi went public and pushed for the woman to have her head shaved. I lost more respect when I learned of Gandhi's body hatred (but with his fixation on purity, hatred of human (read animal) emotions, and death wish this shouldn't have surprised me), and even more that he refused to have sex with his wife for the last thirty-eight years of their marriage (in fact he felt that people should have sex only three or four times in their lives). I lost even more when I found out how upset he was when he had a nocturnal emis-



sion. I lost even more when I found out that in order to test his commitment to celibacy, he had beautiful young women lie next to him naked through the night: evidently his wife—whom he described as looking like a “meek cow”—was no longer desirable enough to be a solid test.²⁰⁹ All these destroyed more respect for Gandhi (although I do recognize it’s possible for someone to be a shitheel and still say good things, just as it’s possible for nice people to give really awful advice). But the final push was provided by this comment attributed to him: “When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but in the end, they always fall—Think of it, ALWAYS.” This is as dismissive as his treatment of his wife and sons. It’s as objectifying as his treatment of the young women he used as tests. It’s as false as his advice to Jews, Czechs, and Britons. The last 6,000 years have seen a juggernaut of destruction roll across the planet. Thousands of cultures have been eradicated. Species are disappearing by the hour. I do not know what planet he is describing, nor what history. Not ours. This statement—one of those rallying cries thrown out consistently by pacifists—is wrong. It is dismissive. It is literally and by definition insane, by which I mean not in touch with the real physical world.²¹⁰

Further, even if it were accurate—which it absolutely isn’t, except in the cosmic sense of everything eventually failing—it’s irrelevant. So what if the tyrant eventually falls? What about the damage done in the meantime? That’s like saying that because a rapist will eventually die anyway we need not stop him now.

